

(ii) Each aggrieved party named in the joint complaint is filing the complaint in regard to the same provision(s) of the same LCD.

(2) *Components of a valid joint complaint.* A joint complaint must contain the following information:

(i) The beneficiary-identifying information described in paragraph (c)(1) of this section for each aggrieved party named in the joint complaint.

(ii) The LCD-identifying information described in paragraph (c)(2) of this section.

(iii) The documentation described in paragraphs (c)(3) and (c)(4) of this section.

(3) *Timeliness of a joint complaint.* Aggrieved parties, who choose to seek review of an LCD—

(i) Before receiving the service, must file with the ALJ a joint complaint within 6 months of the written statement from each aggrieved party's treating physician.

(ii) After receiving the service, must file with the ALJ a complaint within 120 days of each aggrieved party's initial denial notice.

**§ 426.403 Submitting new evidence once an acceptable complaint is filed.**

Once an acceptable complaint is filed, the aggrieved party may submit additional new evidence without withdrawing the complaint until the ALJ closes the record.

**§ 426.405 Authority of the ALJ.**

(a) An ALJ conducts a fair and impartial hearing, avoids unnecessary delay, maintains order, and ensures that all proceedings are recorded.

(b) An ALJ defers only to reasonable findings of fact, reasonable interpretations of law, and reasonable applications of fact to law by the Secretary.

(c) The ALJ has the authority to do any of the following:

(1) Review complaints by an aggrieved party (or aggrieved parties).

(2) Dismiss complaints that fail to comply with § 426.400.

(3) Set and change the date, time, and place of a hearing upon reasonable notice to the parties.

(4) Continue or recess a hearing for a reasonable period of time.

(5) Hold conferences to identify or simplify the issues, or to consider other matters that may aid in the expeditious disposition of the proceeding.

(6) Consult with scientific and clinical experts on his or her own motion concerning clinical or scientific evidence.

(7) Set schedules for submission of exhibits and written reports of experts.

(8) Administer oaths and affirmations.

(9) Examine witnesses.

(10) Issue subpoenas requiring the attendance of witnesses at hearings as permitted by this part.

(11) Issue subpoenas requiring the production of existing documents before, and relating to, the hearing as permitted by this part.

(12) Rule on motions and other procedural matters.

(13) Stay the proceedings in accordance with § 426.340.

(14) Regulate the scope and timing of documentary discovery as permitted by this part.

(15) Regulate the course of a hearing and the conduct of representatives, parties, and witnesses.

(16) Receive, rule on, exclude, or limit evidence, as provided in § 426.340.

(17) Take official notice of facts, upon motion of a party.

(18) Decide cases, upon the motion of a party, by summary judgment when there is no disputed issue of material fact.

(19) Conduct any conference, argument, or hearing in person or, upon agreement of the parties, by telephone, picture-tel, or any other means.

(20) Issue decisions.

(21) Exclude a party from an LCD review for failure to comply with an ALJ order or procedural request without good cause shown.

(22) Stay the proceedings for a reasonable time when all parties voluntarily agree to mediation or negotiation, and provide mediation services upon request.

(d) The ALJ does not have authority to do any of the following under this part:

(1) Conduct an LCD review or conduct LCD hearings on his or her own motion or on the motion of a non-aggrieved party.

(2) Issue a decision based on any new evidence without following § 426.340, regarding procedures for review of new evidence.

(3) Review any decisions by contractors to develop a new or revised LCD.

(4) Conduct a review of any draft, retired, archived, template, or suggested LCDs.

(5) Conduct a review of any policy that is not an LCD, as defined in § 400.202 of this chapter.

(6) Conduct a review of any NCD according to section 1869(f)(1)(A)(i) of the Act.

(7) Conduct a review of the merits of an unacceptable LCD complaint as discussed in § 426.410.

(8) Allow participation by individuals or entities other than—

(i) The aggrieved party and/or his/her representative;

(ii) CMS and/or the contractor; and

(iii) Experts called by the parties or the ALJ.

(9) Compel the parties to participate in a mediation process or to engage in settlement negotiations.

(10) Deny a request for withdrawal of a complaint by an aggrieved party.

(11) Compel the contractor to conduct studies, surveys, or develop new information to support an LCD record.

(12) Deny a contractor the right to reconsider, revise or retire an LCD.

(13) Find invalid applicable Federal statutes, regulations, rulings, or NCDs.

(14) Enter a decision specifying terms to be included in an LCD.

#### § 426.406 *Ex parte* contacts.

No party or person (except employees of the ALJ's office) communicates in any way with the ALJ on any substantive matter at issue in a case, unless on notice and opportunity for all parties to participate. This provision does not prohibit a person or party from inquiring about the status of a case or asking routine questions concerning administrative functions or procedures.

#### § 426.410 *Docketing and evaluating the acceptability of LCD complaints.*

(a) *Docketing the complaint.* The office designated by CMS does the following upon receiving a complaint regarding an LCD:

(1) Dockets the complaint.

(2) Determines whether the complaint is—

(i) The first challenge to a particular LCD; or

(ii) Related to a pending LCD review.

(3) Forwards the complaint to the ALJ that conducts the review. In cases related to pending reviews, the complaint generally is forwarded to the ALJ who is conducting the review.

(b) *Evaluating the acceptability of the complaint.* The ALJ assigned to the LCD review determines if the complaint is acceptable by confirming all of the following:

(1) The complaint is being submitted by an aggrieved party or, in the case of a joint complaint, that each individual named in the joint complaint is an aggrieved party. (In determining if a complaint is acceptable, the ALJ assumes that the facts alleged by the treating physician's documentation regarding the aggrieved party's (or parties') clinical condition are true.)

(2) The complaint meets the requirements for a valid complaint in § 426.400 and does not challenge one of the documents in § 426.325(b).

(c) *Unacceptable complaint.* (1) If the ALJ determines that the complaint is unacceptable, the ALJ must provide the aggrieved party (or parties) one opportunity to amend the unacceptable complaint.

(2) If the aggrieved party (or parties) fail(s) to submit an acceptable amended complaint within a reasonable time-frame as determined by the ALJ, the ALJ must issue a decision dismissing the unacceptable complaint.

(3) If a complaint is determined unacceptable after one amendment, the beneficiary is precluded from filing again for 6 months after being informed that it is unacceptable.

(d) *Acceptable complaint.* If the ALJ determines that the complaint (or amended complaint) is acceptable, the ALJ does the following:

(1) Sends a letter to the aggrieved party (or parties) acknowledging the complaint and informing the aggrieved party (or parties) of the docket number and the deadline for the contractor to produce the LCD record.